

# How is life going for the disability community? (Fourth Survey)

31 July 2020

This report provides a brief overview of some of the key findings from the fourth online survey on *How is life going for the disability community?* The survey was open from 30 June to 14 July 2020. The purpose of the suite of surveys was to understand the issues associated with the COVID-19 pandemic being experienced by disabled people and their family/whānau. The surveys also collected information from service providers and others in the disability sector (eg community advocates).

The fourth survey, carried out at Level 1, provides a snapshot of disabled New Zealanders' life circumstances in the COVID-19 recovery phase. Movement around New Zealand and most other restrictions and legal requirements imposed on businesses, services and individuals had been relaxed.

## Participation in and completion of the disability survey

109 responses in total were received. The completion rates (ie every question answered) for the Easy Read, Standard-Disabled People and Whānau, Standard-Service Providers, and New Zealand Sign Language-Disabled People and Whānau versions of the disability survey were 67%, 49%, 48% and 50% respectively.

## Many of the issues that the survey respondents are experiencing during the COVID-19 recovery phase do not point to significant change

### *Individual and family/whānau wellbeing and access to food and essential items*

The weighted averages (ie scaled averages) for both individual and family/whānau wellbeing, and access to food and essential items in the fourth round of the survey were the same or very close to the weighted averages in the third round. Issues raised were similar to previous rounds of the survey, including financial stress and emotional issues relating to personal and family relationships.

### *Home safety*

The weighted average for home safety was lower than that of the third round of the survey. There may, for example, have been increased concern among respondents about

the imminent ending of the rent freeze, given that disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to live in rental accommodation.

### *Access to PPE*

The ability to access PPE increased among respondents. However, concerns raised included being unsure of how to access PPE and PPE affordability.

### *Information access and understanding*

The fourth survey (like the three previous surveys) did not identify a major difficulty in accessing COVID-19 information. The percentage of respondents reporting that accessing information was okay or better sat between 84% and 93% across the four surveys. Similarly, three-quarters of respondents in the fourth survey reported that they understood very well or mostly quite well the Government's information about COVID-19.

It is arguable that the concerns expressed in the fourth survey about accessing information relate to public information in the COVID-19 recovery phase being primarily available online (eg COVID-19 website). This puts disabled people without internet access at a disadvantage. Less public information is now accessible through news bulletins and the media.

### *Loneliness and isolation*

The number of those surveyed stating that they felt lonely most of the time or all of the time in the past seven days was low in the three previous surveys and had decreased further in the final survey. Disabled people at Level 1 can get out and about and socialise more. However, it is reasonable to assume that some disabled people remain apprehensive about leaving their homes in the COVID-19 recovery phase and beyond.

### *COVID-19 healthcare*

Respondents in the fourth survey reported that access to COVID-19 testing and health services increased. Central testing stations moving to rural centres and doctors' clinics running testing have contributed to this increased access at Level 1.

### *Employment*

A question on employment was added to the fourth round of the survey. This question was also asked in round one. Most respondents reported that their employment status had not changed since the beginning of March 2020. Given the very small sample size for the respondents whose employment status had been affected, it is not possible to draw any meaningful conclusions.

### **Some survey respondents commented on major risks or issues for people in the disability community during the COVID-19 recovery phase**

Although many of the issues raised by respondents in the fourth round of the survey do not point to fundamental change, comments were made on significant risks/issues still being experienced by disabled people, including:

- access to adequate and appropriate support services
- isolation/loneliness/lack of support

- financial strain/unemployment/underemployment
- disabled people/vulnerable groups being left off the radar
- lack of adequate communication to vulnerable groups
- anxiety about COVID-19 returning to the community
- lack of accessible housing
- information available in accessible formats.